

Coaching Tips

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You Need Permission to Coach

- The effective coach defines boundaries of the relationship. Are you a trusted friend and advisor? Are you just listening and providing feedback? Are you providing advice, opinions and direction? Are you providing material help for a project or the achievement of a specific goal? The agreement for what you provide can be different for each individual, group, team or project. But to work, what you provide must be agreed upon.
- Provide the help that is requested or offer choices, rather than forcing a specific kind of help onto an individual, and continue to ask for clarification and feedback. ('We could do the literature search together, if that would be helpful, or I can give you this handout page on literature search strategies and you can work through this yourself. Which would be better for you?')
- Master the phrase, 'would that be helpful?' since that invites feedback about an action plan or advice that you have offered and maintains the individual in control of the process.
- Coach only on first hand data. One of the best ways to lose credibility is to coach someone on a performance or behaviors that have been reported to you by a third party. Suggest to the third party that they coach the performer on their observations.

The Coach is Not In Control

- Coaching is not a one-sided initiative. It is a dialogue, a give-and-take, a sharing of ideas and information. The coach does not always have to be the initiator or lead any given conversation. Those we are coaching can take the lead. Practice good leadership and good followership behaviors. Practice humility.
- Timing is everything. Two principles: (1) Only intervene when the time is right, and (2) be available when the person you are coaching needs you and offer your time.
- Your knowledge, your effectiveness as a communicator, and your developed relationship will impact a person's willingness to use your input. If your input isn't being used, it is likely because one of these factors needs to be addressed. Get some coaching for yourself to help identify the problem.
- If you are in control or giving all the answers, people are less likely to 'own' and fully enroll in the solution or answer. You can put a question back to an individual by saying, 'Let's explore the possibilities. Or What is it that you really want? Or What have you considered doing? Or What do you think you need to do to move to the next level? Or How do you think the situation should be handled?' You can provide options, recommend resources, and give opinions, but ultimately the person you are coaching will need to decide on the final solution and the results will be stronger and richer because there was ownership.
- Resistance often means you are pressing your solutions onto others or that they need to feel more control in the situation. As for feedback about resistance by saying 'I'm sensing that these suggestions aren't fitting well for you, what would you rather be doing?'

The Coach Must Trust and Believe

- Coaching is based on the belief that people want to and can do a good job. If, down deep, you don't believe that, you probably are not the best coach for a specific situation or group. The better decision might be to help the group/individual identify a coach.
- Communicate high expectations and trust in people's abilities.

Lead From Example

- Be an exemplar and model the desired behavior. Do not expect people to do something that you can't do.

Be a Knowledgeable Coach and Resource

- Coaching is related to several other organizational processes including change management, team building, facilitation, performance management and consultation. You should be clear about where coaching fits as a part of these other processes.
- Coaching is not therapy, or training or consulting. Each has its appropriate time and situation. Spend some time learning which is called for in what kinds of situations, and be clear in any interaction which you are involved in providing.
- Examine whether instead of coaching, you are actually playing any of these roles: avenger, rescuer, bully, nag, friend, disciplinarian, confidant, confederate or playmate. These roles may have nothing to do with the coaching process. Don't confuse the situation by pretending to coach when you are doing something else.
- There is no single way to coach people in all situations. Think about under what situations and with what types of individuals will this strategy produce useful results? This will help you become a flexible, versatile, and adaptive coach.
- Admit failure. Model a key component of lifelong learning by being honest with your own performances and using them as an opportunity for learning.
- Explore seminars, books and websites for coaching/mentoring advice

Practice Highly Honed Communication and Relationship Building Skills

- Coaching is always about relationship, particularly listening and valuing.
- Ask questions to gain more information and ensure understanding.
- Never start coaching until you have developed a relationship and never stop working on the relationship.
- Don't coach when you are upset. You will end up taking out your frustrations on someone. Wait until you are calm and centered. Also don't coach when other people are upset. Give the person time to recover.
- Create an equal footing with those you are coaching and do whatever you can to help make the individuals you are coaching feel comfortable. If the people you are coaching report to you or perceive your status to be higher, know that they are more likely to say things what you want to hear, more than they would to a co-worker, spouse or friend. With authenticity, affirm the importance of their opinions and contributions to you/the project ('Your contributions really made a difference to me and to the organization (or a specific project); Here's why:....')
- When coaching a team, clearly define everyone's goals and objectives for the project. Communicate roles and responsibilities to the group, as a group, so that everyone understands how the project will come together and who is responsible for what.
- Remember to follow-up. Send a quick e-mail or follow-up phone call to check how things are going, if the work together was helpful for progress, or to see if there was anything else they needed right now.

Help the Person You Are Coaching Develop Their Own Solutions

- When a problem, topic or opportunity is identified, ask the person you are coaching for ideas. Listen actively and attentively but don't discuss each item or critique pros/cons. When they have run out of ideas, ask for some more. Only offer your ideas after the person you are coaching has completed their list, and then offer your ideas tentatively 'What if we tried to....', 'Maybe you could..' or 'another option might be...'
- The most useful coaching is situational. Consider the difficulty of the task, the skills and the experience of the person you are coaching and their preferences in terms of how much help should be given. Sometimes people don't want/ need 'the answer', they need a little assistance in finding out how to get the answer themselves.
- Sometimes in asking questions, people already know the answer, but are seeking reassurance and confirmation. You will enhance people's capabilities and self-esteem if you ask what they think, and

where possible confirm that their answer is the correct path. Your role as coach is to strengthen competency, not to demonstrate that you know the answers.

- Sometimes a warm smile, with eye contact and telling the other person 'I know you are going to come up with a great solution!' is all the motivation and help they need in order to shine.

Focus on Strengths and Opportunities not Weaknesses and Problems

- Resist the temptation to ask why. Asking 'why' is often experienced as a blaming or fault finding question. Instead of 'Why didn't you finish this project on time?' try 'What got in your way and how can you deal with it next time?'
- Avoid giving advice. Advice usually brings out the 'yes but...' response. Instead try to provide information that the person can use to chart their next course of action.
- In every group coaching situation, acknowledge and show appreciation for each person's contribution, no matter how small. Each person deserves to be acknowledged, and rewarding small efforts can inspire them to bigger efforts the next time.
- Praise, praise, praise! Even if the person being coached bombs completely, find something positive to say that will give them an anchor to hold on to. Not one likes to fail. Help people to 'fail' with their dignity intact and they will take away a positive learning experience.

The Coach is Always an Educator

- You educate people as you work with them as a supportive partner and coach. Your goal is to make them self-sufficient.
- You give them the tools the need to build their skills and to be successful in their goals and interpersonal relationships. Your job is to leave them feeling stronger, more knowledgeable and more capable of addressing opportunities in the future.
- Your job is to do yourself out of a job!

Strengthen the Impact of Your Feedback

- Feedback is communication to a person or team of people regarding the effect their behavior is having on another person, the organization, the customer or the team.
- Effective feedback involves the sharing of information and observations. It does not include advice unless you have permission or advice was requested.
- Feedback involves what or how something was done not why. Asking why may provoke defensiveness.
- Whenever possible, feedback that is requested is more powerful. Ask permission to provide feedback. Say, 'I'd like to give you some feedback about the presentation, would that be okay with you?'.
- All feedback positive and constructive should be timely (closely tied to the event, where possible), specific and frequent.
- Be open to receiving feedback yourself, and be sure to request it. The best coaches learn also. Remember to model the 'best practices' of receiving feedback (it might just be a test).
- Recognition for effective performance is a powerful motivator. Most people want to obtain more recognition, so recognition fosters more of the appreciated actions.